

Bushwhacking in Ontario's Woodland Caribou Provincial Park

A trip in the summer of 2010 from Domain Lake to Royd Lake and beyond

By Martin Kehoe

Part 1 Johnson Lake access to Domain Lake

View videos for this trip at –TheNorthwoodsman1- on youtube.com

<http://www.youtube.com/user/TheNorthwoodsman1?feature=mhsn>



The wind and the waves are high as I sit snugly under my low slung tarp. The sound of rain pattering on the roof, joined by the shrieking of a gull are the sounds of my first morning of this 30 day solo paddle in Woodland Caribou Provincial Park (WCPP.) I left home on the Illinois-Wisconsin border in the USA early in the morning on July 13, 2010. About 14 hours and 800 miles later I had arrived at the River B&B about 20 miles from Red Lake, Ontario. A left turn just after crossing the Chukuni River bridge and another left turn into the driveway and the day's travels were done. I had enjoyed Dorothy Wilson's great hospitality and beautiful home last year also. It is a nice quiet riverside home to relax in after a long drive. After a large breakfast Dorothy encouraged me to take a coffee for the road and I was on my way to the WCPP offices.

Permits can be purchased through a phone call and E-mail or the kiosk at the Heritage center but I wanted to talk my route over with the staff. By 9:30 I was at Goldseekers Outfitters and finishing up details for my shuttle to and from the Johnson Lake entry

point. The road is really good most of the way to Johnson Lake but I did not want to leave my vehicle sitting there or anywhere for a month unattended.

A light rain came and went as I went through the three portages to Douglas Lake. The map shows four but I have always been able to stay on the water for the fourth. A campsite near the Douglas end of the portage to Hatchet provided a great spot to have a quick lunch of Mac and Cheese. The portage to Hatchet is steep and rocky but being rested the three carries across with heavy loads went well. A south breeze pushed me north on Hatchet until I took the west arm and paddled over to the Upper Hatchet portage. The portage had a few rocky climbs and one short soft section marked up with moose tracks. Lightning was dropping out of a storm cell 5 miles to the south so finding a campsite was next on the agenda. I had marked my map with a campsite seen on the PDF map online but saw no sign of a possible camp in my hurried scan of the area. With minutes to spare I found an opening not far away and strung the tarp and threw the gear under it. It was the only opening I saw at the time and has served me well as the site is sheltered from the strong SW winds. With the wind howling and rain pelting the tent I slept on until after nine the next morning.

Now it is decision time. The skies are clearing and the wind is abating, so do I move on or enjoy the afternoon here. Lethargy wins out and I spend a second night on Upper Hatchet. If I had moved on I would have fought headwinds that increased as the afternoon progressed. I was still tired and was back in the sleeping bag by 7:00. The sound of wind in the trees awakened me through the night. Since I had fairly big water to cross throughout the day I did not worry about getting an ultra early start to get across Upper Hatchet. All of the portages to Telescope Lake were in pretty good shape considering how wet it had been lately. Upper Hatchet and Embryo are nice lakes with old timber stands surrounding them. Unfortunately there are boat caches on every lake from Douglas to Telescope and down the Gammon River. I did not see anyone until a motorboat passed me on Telescope Lake. There was a cabin near where I entered Telescope and another after the rapids into Optic Lake but I saw no one around them.

On the north side of Optic I spotted what turned out to be a great campsite on a ledge 6 meters above the water. A nice canoe landing and a gentle 50 meter climb to the level site. Further east on the ledge there is room for several more tents. Best of all, a small island blocks out the cabin on the other side of the lake. It had not been used before but I would recommend using it if you pass through, especially if the fly-in camp cabin hidden by the island is not occupied.



The next morning the sun was warming the tent as I finally unzipped my sleeping bag. An hour later I was paddling around the corner to begin the exploration that has brought me to this Gammon River section. My first goal this trip is to find a route north into Domain Lake. Once there I will try to bushwhack further north and intercept the maintained portage route between Upper Gammon Lake and Indian House Lake. For the sake of the readers of this journal I am going to mark the paragraphs that only describe the efforts and findings of these searches with XXX. It will save readers from having to read a lot of gibberish that may be of no interest to them.

XXX Armed with GPS, topo map and printed satellite images the exploration begins. The first good news is a nice sandy landing. The first bad news is not seeing any old blazes on the old timber near shore that escaped the big fire years ago. For the rest of the search it is all bad news. An Alder choked strip, steep rock walls and thick young trees everywhere else. A retreat is made to the start and I do a fairly steep climb to the high rock above. I get my hopes up and head toward the next lake but soon run into a large wet Black Spruce bog. I veer east in hope of higher ground but only find a trace of an old winter trail through the sparse and stunted Spruce. With options running out I follow the old trail as best I can. When the terrain gets better the vegetation again becomes a wall. I push through and finally get to the swampy edge of the sought after lake. It is time for a break but the bugs are thick and a different course is plotted for the return to Optic Lake. A contour line on the GPS map is followed but it is still swamp and then steep climbs back

to high rock. From some of the high spots I could look down on Optic Lake. It is soon obvious that this option to Domain Lake needs to be struck from the list.

Finally back to my canoe and after a short paddle to camp it is time for a swim. My clothes are rinsed and wrung out before being hung to dry. After lunch and a cup of coffee another review of the Google images is undertaken. In comparing the area that stymied me this morning to the other possibilities to access Domain Lake I am starting to have some doubts. It looks like getting into Domain using four small lakes may be possible. As for exiting to the north, that is going to be tough. Even if I find a good future route I may not be able to get my canoe through the dense young trees.

With the bookwork done the kitchen pail is loaded with everything needed for a shore lunch and the fishing pole rigged. A few Northern were lost but one finally made it to the stringer. There is no net and the barbs are flattened on the two hooks I leave on a treble. Fishing is so easy in WCPP that some lost fish seldom leave you short for a good meal. A big flat rock out in the lake makes a great place for a fish fry. As the sun gets lower in the sky I head back to recline on the rock terraces of my lofty camp. The humidity has dropped and also the number of bugs pestering me.

Sunday morning dawned beautiful. At 10:00 I was on my way across Optic Lake. The Home Church I attend would be beginning by singing some praise and worship songs. They would not know it but there were some more voices this morning. A pack of wolves was joining in from WCPP. The paddle rested in my lap until the pack had finished their chorus. The water was calm as I resumed paddling toward the portage to Glenn Lake. Motorboats are cached at each portage but there is no one around these waters today. Loons are plentiful along with the occasional Bald Eagle. In the narrows a Hairy Woodpecker calls and soon after a Pileated Woodpecker calls as it flies over. A nice campspot on Glenn provided a nice spot to pull over and have lunch. With a mug of hot coffee between my feet I headed around a bend and toward the next potential access route to Domain Lake. Four small lakes may be able to be used to get there. Before the mug was half gone the potential route lay in front of me. A cruise along the shore and close scrutiny of the trees revealed no old blazes even though my notes denote one seen some years ago. My GPS revealed it was only 130 meters to the first lake. I could not help myself, I had to pull over and check it out before finding a campsite for the night.

XXX The curser on the GPS was scrolled over to the next lake on the GPS screen. A punch on the enter button to establish a waypoint and another punch on the "GO TO" to establish the bearing needed and I was on my way. The map screen is set up with two data screens at the top. One has an arrow pointing to my destination and another showing distance to destination. Running in the background is the tracking feature. It has been cleared so only the walk to the lake will be recorded as a breadcrumb trail. Using the "track" feature rather than recording waypoints as I walk reduces all the clutter on the small screen.

XXX As the woods were entered it was nice to see that the timber was older here. Natural thinning provided an open understory in the Birch and Spruce trees. In a few minutes the

first lake lay before me. The “Tracks” page is brought up on the GPS screen and the track is saved and checked so it will show on my map screen. The lake was small and I started walking around it to the next probable portage. It was tough walking getting there but an open rock run provided a great start to the next portage. Dense young trees eventually closed in but the terrain still presented a good portage route on to the next lake. It would make a great portage if opened up but was too thick to get my canoe through. With that in mind the track was saved and an exploration along the creek from the first lake began. The creek or its banks can be used for my route in a few days. The walls closed in to the water in one spot but with caution the shallow rapids could be walked. Happy that things were looking up I went back to my canoe and paddled across the lake to a nearby campspot.

Monday morning I celebrated the finding with a feast of Blueberry pancakes. Well stoked with fuel I paddled a few miles west to check on yet another possible access to Domain Lake. It would be a long 1000 meter portage if the terrain allows. After a morning of thrashing in the brush I had saved a track showing a 1200 meter future portage to Domain. It starts at Glenn with a climb on semi-open rock and then goes through an area of thick young spruce as it descends to Domain Lake. The search also helped me understand what the Google satellite images show for different terrain types.

A cool rain was coming down during the paddle back to camp. Tea water was put on to boil and the heat from the stove felt so good that a rice and bean packet that had to simmer for twenty minutes was selected for lunch. Tea, a hot lunch and the stove heat left me warmed up nicely. It is great to have that future portage nailed down. Unfortunately my canoe and packs cannot be pushed through the dense young trees. I need to go back to the Four Lakes route if I want to get to Domain Lake with my canoe. Late in the afternoon a paddle over to the Four Lakes route was made. A track was saved through which I can get my canoe to the first lake tomorrow. Camp will be left here on Glenn until more is learned about the Four Lakes route. For now I am enjoying a warm, sunny and bugless evening here on Glenn. Fishing crossed my mind but was soon put aside and a simpler supper put on to simmer.

Tuesday morning’s first cup of coffee was being enjoyed while a pair of loons fished a few meters away. Suddenly they became agitated as young human voices drifted across the water from four passing canoes. My second human encounter in a weeks time. Camping on the Gammon River I had expected a lot more since it is a beautiful paddle with few portages.

XXX It was after 10:00 when the exploration got underway to find a passage to Domain Lake through the unknown sections of the Four Lakes route. First Lake was attained quickly using the route laid out yesterday. A few paddle strokes and it was time to scout out the path to Second Lake using the creek. The chosen path started with 50 meters of swampy ground before attaining firmer ground on stream left. A hundred meters later the walls forced me into a small rocky rapid. Then some of the swampy plodding to Second Lake. It was tough going but it could have been a lot worse. Halfway through an old tree is blazed on each side showing this as the favored route in days gone by. On the way

back to First Lake I walked and recorded a track on the route up on the high rock. The 1200 meter route is the best route to Domain but I might as well record the information



while I am here. The canoe was paddled up Second Lake and it did not take long to plot a 100 meter portage to Third Lake. The trees are thinning themselves and the rotten losers are easily pushed aside to make room for the canoe. The portage has to end in some bog because of some high rock preventing a better ending. A creek and marsh connected Third and Fourth Lake and I planned on using them to get through. In case it is ever opened up I recorded a track on the high rock on the east side. It still ended in 70 meters of bog and seemed to be the best route. Very happy with how fast the exploration was going I headed back to the canoe using the marsh. It was firm going and then I found a moose trail that was even firmer. Things really improved when the moose trail entered a 50 meter ribbon of smooth rock.

With only one short portage left to plot I headed back to camp rather than carry my canoe back and forth across the bog. What could have been an all day affair turned into a mid-day romp. With a leisure paddle back through the lakes I was back at camp by 4:00.

When the sun rose Wednesday morning the thought of trudging all that bog to Domain convinced me to roll over for a little more sleep. Even with that the move was under way by 8:30. The first 125 meter portage went quickly. The second portage was the walk up the creek flowing from Second Lake. I took it slow and easy and concentrated on enjoying the journey. No one had probably been through here in decades yet it has been

used for centuries. Second Lake is marked as Diarrhea Lake on my notes! Obviously someone has some not so fond memories of their stay here. The camera was set up on the tripod and some video taken of my travel in the rapids. To show all aspects some video was also shot of my paddle through Second Lake. The video shot on the fourth portage may look bad but for a day of bushwhacking it went fine. A large open rock made a good lunch spot on Fourth Lake. The Google satellite images hinted to me that the last portage to Domain could be really short. The 33 meter portage was short and sweet. The hard ground led right to a long sliver of water protruding from Domain Lake. A tiny island on Domain Lake of bare rock made a great place for a celebratory swim and to rinse the bog mud from my clothes.

The weather reports my wife has been texting me through the Sat. phone are calling for high winds tomorrow so a camp is selected with that in mind. The camp is near where Domain Creek exits on it way to Hansen Lake. That is another route I want to check out tomorrow while the winds blow. Right now all I can think about is a relaxing evening in camp reclining against the rock slabs.

After a fair amount of R&R and a filling supper it is time for a paddle around this end of Domain Lake. It is a very pleasant evening for such an excursion. My path took me by the end of the 1200 meter portage I had mapped the other day. It should make for an easy access to Domain Lake and be easy to maintain whenever the portage crews are on the Gammon River. A few campsites were waypointed as I cruised along the shoreline. One had a firering but had not been used in a few years. There is a fly-in cabin on Domain Lake so maybe it was just used for a shorelunch. There was enough time that I was able to check out Domain Creek. It exits the lake with 200 meters of log jammed rapids. A little further down it is open as it winds through a marsh. Back at camp a review of the

Google images shows that it flows through a lot of wooded sections that are also probably filled with log jams.





Part 2 Domain Lake to Royd Lake

Thursday morning dawned calm and the decision was made to forgo hike down Domain Creek and move my camp closer to the route I am hoping to use to exit the lake. With a quick breakfast of coffee and a Cliff Bar the canoe was loaded before 8:00. My hat brim shielded the bright morning sun as a slow paddle got under way. The forecast was for high winds and soon the clouds overhead looked like the wind was shrieking through them and turning them into horse tails. On the water things remained calm as I was able to paddle up a narrow chute on my way to the northeast. The paddle remained pleasant and uneventful all the way to my destination. The timber on the north shore was mature and continued that way all the way to my intended portage. As I came around a corner a boat could be seen where the outpost cabin must be. I headed for the area of my portage and was pleased to see a nice spot for a camp hidden deep in a bay. I was not going to camp where the cabin guest could look out and see my multi-colored tarp and yellow tent. If this route is ever opened up it will make a great camp for those who come across the portage and the lake is too rough to cross.



A look at the old timber and the lay of the land has lowered my anxiety level. I need to be on Royd Lake in nine days to meet some friends who are flying in. After coming this far I would rather not have to backtrack to the Gammon River to get there. With some of the pressure off the fishing pole was rigged and the kitchen pail equipped for another shore lunch of fried fish and hash browns. While fishing a boat from the cabin spotted me and came over. Smiling faces approached and that was nice to see. You never know what the attitude may be when an intruder is found on what some may feel is their wilderness lake. It was the fishermen's first stay at the Domain cabin but they were still surprised to see a canoe tripper. The shore lunch worked out as planned with another Northern providing the main entrée. The lure of the next portage was calling me but time was taken for a cup of coffee and getting the journaling caught up. The bright tarp had once again attracted a Hummingbird. It flew under and over and then sat on a guy rope to study it some more. Finding no gigantic nectar supply it finally flew off.

XXX When I went to check out the next portage a collection of old junk caught my eye. Old lantern fuel cans and thick plastic hinted at it being over twenty years old. One large bear proof locker must have weighed over a hundred pounds. This was on the west side of the creek and I headed north to the next lake from there. It could be used but I am hoping for a better route on the east side of the creek. The particular shade of solid green on the Google images is hinting at older timber with no rock outcroppings over there. The open rock is good while it lasts but the undulating terrain that comes with it has taught me to appreciate the deep solid green patches in the images. After landing the canoe on

the east side a “GO TO” was set up for the next lake and I optimistically set out. A straight course was maintained to record a route that can be opened with a chainsaw in the future. A few dense sections were encountered but on the way back a track was recorded that weaves around them.

A light rain has been falling and now that I am reclining at camp under the rain tarp it is increasing. There have been a lot of two minute showers in the last week but this has the feel of an all-nighter. It will be a good test for my new Tundraline tent that Cliff Jacobson helped Eureka design.

The rain ceased during the night, the high winds never blew and Friday morning dawns balmy, not the sixty degrees forecast by the weatherman. Sometimes you are happy when he misses the mark completely. With the good weather I am anxious to explore the route north from Domain to a three mile long lake I hope to be able to use in the route. Taking the canoe and a day pack to the next lake went smoothly using the weaving track recorded yesterday. The portage to the next lake only took a few minutes to plot out. A nice rock area only supported a few trees and provided a nice route for the short portage.

XXX With anticipation I finally approached the portage that worries me the most. It is 600 meters in a straight line to Three Mile Lake. Also there is no creek connecting the two waters so the only way across will be through the trees. Before starting out the Google images were stared at one more time. I decided to break the conquest into sections. A “GO TO” was set for the west side of a stand of Spruce trees 200 meters away. This was my interpretation of the Google image. A rapid ascent to higher rock and I was soon following a nice rock run in almost the right direction. When one rock run ended in a cluster of dense young trees I was able to push through and find another rock



run going in almost the right direction. Soon I was on a long rock run with the aimed for Spruce stand to my left and below the ridge I was standing on. This meant the rock runs going in almost the right direction put me on the opposite side from my target. That did not worry me because the terrain ahead

looked promising. The grain of the rock in this area was favorable and really working well for me. Looking down on my intended course showed it to be low with deep moss. The rest of the morning was spent connecting rock runs all the way to Three Mile Lake. The north end presented a few challenges and the course had to weave around a nasty ravine. Once the course was generally laid out I went back to my canoe and fixed lunch. An inquisitive turtle watched me the whole time with only its nose and eyes showing above the water. The early afternoon was spent putting the final touches on the route. It ended being 727 meters long but makes a great hike to Three Mile Lake as it is almost entirely on hard and smooth rock surface. From the vantage point at the Three Mile Lake end of the portage it looks to be a very nice lake. Best of all, I have never been there before! Others have surely traveled through here but with so many different rock runs I never saw any of their blazes. Back on the first portage from Domain I came upon a log with a two meter section sawn out it while recording the straight line track to the next lake. It had been cut ten to twenty years ago.

My alarm clock Saturday morning was the float plane coming in to change out the cabin guest for the week. The lake is like a mirror this morning so I linger over my mug of coffee and enjoy it. Another lazy start but by 11:00 I am enjoying the view from the start of the portage to Three Mile Lake. My lunch guest from yesterday has returned and still can't figure out what is happening on his little lake. Black-backed Woodpeckers were feeding on the mature Spruce trees on the first portage. Here on the turtle's lake a Flicker and an Olive-sided Flycatcher are calling from the treetops. The two little lakes traveled this morning are quite scenic. A lot of open rock and small bogs grace their shores. The number of potential campspots is impressive. They seem to be excellent lakes for observing wildlife. Domain Lake is nice but the vastness and amount of rock wall shoreline limit the wildlife activity. Bugs the whole trip have not been a problem but this portage supports a healthy population at each end. Blackflies were especially troublesome. Lacking a mirror I can't see the damage but my right eyelid seems to have swelled into a permanent squint.

The three carries across the portage went very well. Each time on the return I would check out a possible alteration but found no further improvements. Satisfied that the 737 meter route will make the best portage I celebrated with a fully clothed swim on Three Mile Lake. Thunder was sounding as the water boiled for a cup of coffee. Anxious to see what lay ahead the coffee mug was set between my feet and the cruise commenced. Ten paddle strokes later the skies let loose with a drenching rain of monstrously sized drops. My clothes were soaked anyway so the journey continued close to shore because of the distant lightning. The storm passed and the cooling breeze felt good after the long portage. The cruise up scenic Three Mile Lake with its ten meter walls was taken slowly to soak it all in. This is the first truly wild lake of any size for this trip.

My goal was to get past a narrow spot in the lake before camping. At the narrows the canoe was coaxed over the boulders without portaging. Closer thunder on a few sides makes finding a campsite a top priority. A magnificent bluff on the east shore caught my attention. Directly across the narrow lake was an open flat rock and what looked like a potential campsite. Because the scenic views from the camp point are so grand some

shortcomings in the site would be overlooked. A mad dash to unload the canoe and hang the tarp gave me shelter just as the rains returned. The cool breezes after the first storm had put me on the chilly side. Between the remaining hot coffee and a change to dry clothes I was soon a very happy camper. My mind was soon calculating how much time I could spend enjoying the splendor and solitude of this lake and still make it to Royd Lake on Saturday for my rendezvous with Jim and Ron. The sun was out within an hour and a call on the Sat. phone to my wife let me know all was well and my weather for the next week was looking great.

Nighthawks are calling overhead and a few beaver slapping their tails in protest over my presence on their lake. The evening is perfect and the invigoration of being on this remote lake puts me in the mood for an evening paddle on calm waters. Supplies were taken for a fish fry and a lure trolled behind. Even below the bluff the lake is only four meters deep so Northern will probably be the entrée again tonight. Soon two of them were on the stringer and a smooth rock shore selected for the feast.

The sun had dropped over the western walls by the time the kitchen bucket was packed and the cruise continued. The next portage lured me to the north end of the glassy lake. A blaze was spotted and an open trail headed up the hill. It was getting dark but the exploration pull was too strong to resist a walk up the hill. At the top of the hill the trail entered a wet area which was disappointing but at least there was a trail. What lay in the next 500 meters would have to wait until tomorrow.

A pinkish full moon hovers over the eastern horizon. The buzzing calls of the Nighthawks and water dripping from my paddle are the only sounds to be heard on a very slow trip back to camp. The camp is fronted by a twenty meter by five meter deck of solid stone. In one spot there is a perfect recliner built in. It is padded with my Crazy Creek Chair and a thin pad brought specifically for this use. The bugs have taken the night off so I enjoy the tranquility of the lake and full moon in my backcountry lounge.



It is Sunday morning and I plan on spending time putting it to good use. Blue skies, that first cup of coffee and the recliner are all a part of enjoying the moment. There is still a little concern about making it to Royd in time. A look at the maps shows me that there are a few days to spare. I can linger here and not be pushed for time later in the week. Getting here has taken so much time and energy that I am glad to be able to slow down and smell the flowers. It is such a blessing for Three Mile Lake to be so grand, long and winding with numerous islands to add to its beauty. I especially enjoy its variety of habitats and abundant bird life. This morning's alarm clock had been a White-throated Sparrow singing "O Canada." In celebration of a great place I am going to treat myself to Blueberry Pancakes and syrup; a heavy to carry luxury on a long canoe trip.

Early in the afternoon I head out to explore along the shorelines. Near where I had my fish fry there is an old firering, the stones setting on top of some rotten wood. Nearing the north portage my curiosity forces me to check out the rest of the path even though my plan is to take the day off and work on the portage tomorrow. As I had come to fear, the portage trail went over the hill and back down to the creek connecting the two lakes. A great surprise was that it ran parallel to the creek on high and solid ground all the way to the next lake. With the next lake easily attained tomorrows work had been taken care of in an hour. This trail did not show up on my Google images but was marked in my notes. The next portage shows up on the images so should be no problem to move through. The lake after that is accessed through an open stream according to my notes. That will put me near the 1000 meter maintained portage heading towards Prairie Lake. After the complete no-go on Optic Lake last Sunday exploration progress has really improved.

A cow moose is staring at me from a little bay on the way back to camp. A stop was made to inspect an island near camp. The whole island escaped the flames of 35 years ago. It is like an enchanted forest with its deep Sphagnum moss and lichen covering the forest floor which is devoid of understory. Caribou sign was the goal but probably a long shot in this area of big burn in 1974. There is a high rock spine extending the length of the island but even there no animal tracks or droppings are found.

A little later while enjoying the recliner at camp I am awakened by splashing to my left. A loon is taking off into the wind. I have seen float planes get airborne quicker. It wings were flapping but the main propulsion was coming from it big feet running on the waters surface. After getting airborne it did a loop to my right and came streaking back by, now assisted by a strong tailwind. It disappeared around an island just as its mate popped to the surface after a long dive for food. This one started beating its wings and frantically calling as it continually lurched up out of the water. At first I thought a big Northern may have had a grip on its feet. I can only guess as to what the behavior meant. Did one sneak away when the other was not looking?

When I finished my nap the canoe was set up for trolling. A circle around the island produced two Northern. A distant shoreline provided a nice dining spot and left my camp fish odor free. By the time the feast was finished the sun had dropped below the trees and the air was completely still. Perfect conditions for a twilight paddle along darkened shores. The full moon soon appeared. At first only through the silhouettes of the

tree tops. It soon rose above the highest Spruce and threw its glow onto the waters of the lake. It made a perfect punctuation mark at the end of another awesome day in Woodland Caribou.

Monday starts as Sunday closed, with me sitting in my recliner soaking in all that is going on around me. The single loon swims by, still calling for the soul mate that flew off yesterday. One more day and I too will be ready to move away from this special lake. My exploration is almost finished and my body is well rested. More importantly my mind is rested and at ease. Until I made the first paddle stroke on the waters of this lake it wasn't. The lands total rejection of my efforts to find a possible portage from Optic Lake to Domain left me with thoughts of it happening again somewhere else along the route. In the end this route from Glenn Lake to the established route to Indian House has far surpassed in quality what it looked like on paper. The park staff have a great interest in what my search reveals about the area. If they decide to open up these portages it will vastly increase the number of travel loops in the eastern portion of the park. I have been asked why I share this information with others. My answer is that Woodland Caribou is in need of more paddlers to help fund the park. A broader reason is that I believe that God has given us this earth to use and enjoy. My hope is that with these journals others will feel confident to step up to a bigger challenge in their adventures.

The trappers entered Three Mile Lake from the north. The notes on my topo says that there is a trail to a lake on the west. From there they used creeks and marshes on their way to Hansen Lake. The Google images show that all of the trails except the one from this lake are probably only trails fit for winter use. The lake to the west is larger than this one and has many arms and sections. With extra time because the north portage was good to go I decide to look for the trail to the west. Not a sign was found where it should have started. A search turned up no clues of sawn trees or blazes as I weaved my way over to the next lake. The lake must have burned completely in the 1974 fire. It also appears to have pretty flat topography around its shores. An obvious spot for a portage was found and the trek back to my canoe started. One old tree with a definite axe carved blaze was all I found along the way. Other than that there was not one trace of a trail ever being here. I was able to follow a route through several saddles in the landscape. Obviously what would have been the portage of choice for the first man to cross over in centuries past.

Near supper time a thunderstorm to the west of the lake convinced me not to venture too far from the shelter of the rain tarp. I was casting my lure from shore when a big bird dove after the lure as it hit the water. The bird came from behind me and dove completely under water. With a big splash an Osprey came flapping up and out of the water and flew away. When I moved to the other end of the rock deck a number of small fish that I assumed were perch would follow my lure to the bank. While staring at them a turtle came clawing his way along the bottom about a meter from shore. Later when I had caught a Northern I cut into the stomach expecting the dark lump to be a Perch but instead found its last meal to be a crayfish.



As the sun sets it feels like the calm before the storm. The sky is pink overhead with some interesting patterns. The humidity has brought the bugs out early so there will be no waiting on moonrise tonight. The tent is so stuffy that the vestibules on each end are opened up. Fortunately the storm passed to the south and the skies cleared enough for me to watch the moon come up from my screened bedroom.

Tuesday started with a sprinkle but as I enjoy one last interlude in my rock recliner the sun is poking through. Peanut Butter is usually in my daypack for fuel when the going gets tough. This year I have a jar of “Dark Chocolate Dreams” from the Peanut Butter Company. It is peanut butter blended with rich dark chocolate. It is so tasty that the jar was reserved for use with a hot cup of coffee. So as I bid farewell after a restful stay on Three Mile Lake the Dark Chocolate Dreams is licked from the spoon and the mug is tipped up for the last drop.

On the way to the next portage the cow moose crossed in front of me and started to climb onto the enchanted forest island. Scenting me she was soon back out in the water. She did not know what to do but finally disappeared into the trees on the island. I had never seen a calf but maybe she had it hidden on the island after all.

The trappers portage went well. Someday the park can cut a trail through some trees to avoid the wet hole at the top of the hill. A creek entering the next lake was checked out as yet one more route down to Domain. An ancient tree lying on its side by the rapids had a blaze on it but there was no other man made sign. A natural animal trail on stream right was walked out to a narrow water way on the other side but no further. It was lunch time

so after spotting the trappers blaze marking the next portage a lunch break was taken. The trappers trail started well but then entered a boggy area. This is easier for them than clearing a lot of trees on better ground. An easy reroute on solid rock was mapped on one of the return trips for more gear. A thunderstorm passed over and I took shelter under my propped up canoe for a few minutes. The final leg out to the maintained canoe route to Indian House Lake was through the open stream my notes mentioned.

On the 1000 meter portage towards Prairie Lake a young Otter came down the trail towards me. I spoke thinking it would vamoose. Instead it came right to me. It seemed to be lost and wondering where momma was. That was also the exact thought I was having! They really throw hissy fits when you encounter them with a family of young ones while paddling. As it neared my saw was used to keep it off my feet. On the way back for another load it had made it further down the trail but was still searching for mom.

The island campsite on Prairie was occupied so I selected another one nearer the trappers trail I plan on using to exit Prairie. For the last few years I have been exploring a route that connects Royd Lake with Indian House Lake via Lightning Lake and East Royd Creek. The trappers trail will be a shortcut to intercept this route. Once across the next trappers trail I will be in familiar country. I will use the route I call "Minjim" to get to Royd Lake and meet my friends. We will then retrace Minjim and use it to get to North Prairie and through Indian House to the Lund entrance. The outfitter will have their car there so once I see them off I will retreat back into the park for five more days.

Before camp had been set up the unknown aspect of the trail enticed me to do a quick check. The trail was found and had water running down it. The Google images show that it passes through several boggy areas so some time will be spent trying to find a dry route for future use. With my curiosity sated I went back to the nearby island and started to set up camp. I paused as a pack of wolves started howling from where I will be heading tomorrow. A cool wind moved in and assured that the sleeping bag would feel good tonight.

The cool night did provide a good nights sleep. That was a really good thing because the next day ended up being hard and long. The morning's project was to use the trappers trail and get to a lake northwest of Prairie. That lake has a campsite high above the water so I refer to the lake as "High Camp Lake."

XXX The first thing I did was to find the best landing available for a good portage to High Camp Lake. The rock came out to the water only a few hundred meters from the trapper's route and I landed there. I walked from there to do an appraisal of the terrain on the way to the next lake. Rock runs were used when available but the first pass involved pushing through some thick growth also. I crossed the trappers trail midway to High Camp Lake. The trappers trail dropped into the Spruce bog but I pushed ahead on higher ground and got to the other lake. The last 20 meters are flooded but there is no other drier ending with the present water levels the beavers have the lake at. An even better route was walked on the way back to the canoe. The canoe was moved over to the trapper's boggy start and my food pack carried toward the other side. To the midway point the trail

was muddy but fairly firm. Solid high rock at the midway point soon gave way to soft moss in the Spruce bog. Each 50 meters it got harder and harder to walk. The last 200 meters were an absolute hell. It was flooded floating bog with fallen trees adding to the misery. The pack was left on some logs that I hoped would hold it out of the water until I returned. One thing was certain; I was not carrying any more loads through the last half of the trappers trail. There had to be an easier way on the high ground. The rest of the gear was hauled up to where the trappers trail crossed the dry portage route I had mapped out. The future portage was too thick to use but there was enough open rock areas that I was able to get my gear moved to the other side in a series of 50 to 200 meter segments. Past mistakes had taught me that in such circumstances you always record a waypoint when laying down a pack in the bush, even when you have only gone 50 meters. Eight hours after landing my canoe on the rock the ordeal was finally over. My dry future portage and the trappers trail form an X on the map. The trapper went the wettest way for a winter trail and I plotted the driest to portage canoes.

Since I will be coming back through High Camp Lake next week with my friends my gear and food was sorted out and a pack was raised high between two trees to be retrieved then. I have done this on other long trips. I set up a route with a loop in it so all the food and fuel do not have to be carried every day of the trip. With lightened gear I now head west on another trappers trail. This one is fantastic. To access the next lake I walked along the marsh that connects the two lakes. Half way down this lake I made camp. A wolf howled from across the water as I worked. Two nights will be spent here so the tarp went up too. The supper meal revived me and energy was found to put the canoe in the water for a cruise and a little trolling. The lake is connected to Joey Lake and its Walleyes so I was not surprised when I returned to camp with a Walleye to be enjoyed with pancakes in the morning.

The sun was pretty high in the sky when the Walleye fillets hit the frying pan. My appetite had really sharpened by then. Four Walleye fillets joined a three stack of blueberry pancakes for an outstanding brunch. It was now time to check out some things on the Minjim route. To get here yesterday I walked along the edge of a marsh bordering the connecting creek. Last year I had quickly mapped a portage on higher ground but had never tried to carry a canoe through it. A walk through it today showed that a canoe can easily be transported through its sparse tree cover. This area must have burned really hot in the last fire because there is no soil left for trees to grow on. It is a lot of bare rock once you gain a little altitude.

The lake is looking good today. The surface is reflecting the blue sky and is only disturbed by the slightest ripple. It is much prettier than Joey Lake which is only 300 meters away. It lacks the bird life of Three Mile Lake. It also lacks a good campsite. A lot of shoreline but no obvious level places. The site I am using is looking better all the time. I did find an almost level slab of rock back in the trees for my tent. Lunch was skipped today so an early supper is planned. A Northern was caught from shore but taken to another place to be prepared along with some hash browns. I give up a little meat but I prefer to take all the bones out of the Northern. A few extra cuts and the Y bones are left attached to the ribs.

Friday's goal is to get to Constellation Lake and find a nice spot for three of us to camp. The secondary goal is to enjoy the journey. Too often we forget that in our rush to arrive at our destination. A conscious effort was made to go slow with all my senses observant. The canoe was allowed to drift when I came around a corner and six loons were having a raucous dance party. When they went back to fishing I went back to paddling. During lunch the super strength of an ant amazed me. It was dragging twinned pine needles across the rock. Encountering a mountain of lichen it simply stomped up and over. At one snag the ant lost its grip and the pine needles sprang back five ant lengths. Seven hours after starting the first load was set down at the end of the days tenth and last portage. The movement startled about 20 mergansers and they made a mad dash from the nearby rocks. Wing patches flashing and feathers flying they pedaled at high speed to get off the water. A great campsite was found on the southwest corner of Constellation Lake. I knew from a search last year that none would be found further up the lake.

Part 3 The Minjim Route from Royd Lake to North Prairie Lake via Lightning Lake and Joey Lake and on out to the Lund Lake Access

View the video for the Minjim route at-TheNorthwoodsman1-on youtube.com

<http://www.youtube.com/user/TheNorthwoodsman1?feature=mhsn>



This portion of the journal will cover our trip as Jim, Ron and I travel from Royd Lake to the Lund entry point for Woodland Caribou Provincial Park in northwest Ontario,

Canada. We will be using a route that I call the “Minjim Route.” Exploration of the route started in 2007. In 2009 Dick, John, Jim M. and I managed to finish the routing from Joey Lake to North Prairie. 2009 was a terrible year to be canoe tripping anywhere near here. Incessant rains all summer put the water levels in the region at record levels. The high water provided breeding habitat for more bugs than I have ever seen in WCPP. In these oppressive conditions our party of hardy canoeist pushed up swollen creeks and soggy forest. The Minjim name is in tribute to Jim M., one of my partners on that trip.

The Minjim Route uses portages that are not marked on the WCPP park map. Some are not portages at all, just terrain open enough to carry canoes through. I put that warning first because traveling the route does require past experience in bushwhacking and a thorough knowledge of using topo maps, compass and a GPS. I have GPS tracks of all the portages that I can share through attaching a Garmin file to an E-mail but you must be experienced before heading into the Canadian bush on a route like this. With that disclaimer I will now describe the general route we are going to travel. To help with this there is also a video on youtube.com. TheNorthwoodsman1- is my spot on youtube.



We are starting our journey at Royd Lake where my friends are being delivered by floatplane. After July 1, 2011 the closest place a canoeist will be able to land is the Donald Lake landing zone. This will add at least one days travel to the trip since you have to paddle up the west end of Royd Creek to Royd Lake. The first 30 meter portage into Constellation Lake has recently been cleared by the park. At the other end of

outstanding Constellation Lake we will use four river left portages and one open channel to travel up beautiful East Royd Creek. The first real challenge is using a winding creek to get near Lightning Lake. Half way up the valley the creek flows through we will portage around a blocked section of the swampy stream. The next winding section is the hardest of the route because of the tight turns. We have dubbed this section "The Nile" because of the African Queen similarities. Two short portages later we are on Lightning Lake. Two more short portages and we are on what is locally known as "Joey Lake." Joey lake is full of well fed Walleyes and one of the main draws of this route. Three more portages and we are on what I call High Camp Lake. Two more portages and all that is left is a paddle down a stream to North Prairie Lake. With normal water levels this stream should have enough water. At drier levels you will need to pull through a few shallows and over some logs in the stream bottom. North Prairie is the east end of the Minjim Route. On the way out to Lund Lake the parks maintained portages will be used.

About 8:30 Saturday morning a floatplane could be heard flying around Royd Lake. The pancake was just getting brown at my Constellation Camp. My friends were not due until noon so I enjoyed my breakfast before heading over there to meet them. It was my friend's plane and we met up near the 30 meter portage into Constellation. They had a July Saturday noon flight scheduled with Green Airways. They stopped in to let Green Airways know they were in town and see if their flight was still scheduled for noon. They were told that they could be loaded and taken in right then. We had used Green Airways in the past and it has always worked that way. Even when we arrived early we were soon in the air. If you have done any of this flying in with canoes you know how amazing this is. Happy as larks my friends changed their breakfast plans and loaded up.

Jim headed for camp but Ron and I rigged our fishing poles for Lake Trout and let a gentle wind push us south toward camp as we jigged for supper. One eye was kept on a thunderstorm cell that was stalled to the north. We chuckled because if we had been on Irvine today we would be really getting hammered. Our ignorant bliss went on for an hour when it became obvious the storm was fast approaching. I signaled Ron I was heading for camp. Another look at the skies showed clouds racing past at super high speed and the color now a dangerous green. The winds hit me 300 meters from camp and pushed me at high speed toward camp where I hollered to Jim that he would have to grab me as I raced by. Ron had been fishing further back and the storm hit while he was still in the protection of the high walled islands. He pulled under a tree near shore as the storm raged in a fury. The driving sheets of rain prevented us from seeing up the lake so we were relieved when things calmed down a few minutes later and he paddled up to camp.

True to the normal WCPP summer weather pattern the sun was out within the hour and everyone headed back out fishing. Some depth checks showed the large open area of Constellation Lake near camp to be over 100 feet deep in spots. We tried hard but no trout were caught. Near dinner time our standards were lowered to Northern Pike. Four Northerns were turned into a bowl of boneless strips. These were thrown into a pot of Gumbo and simmered for twenty minutes. Well, it actually took two pans to get it all in. A short time later the pots had been scraped clean and we sat near the water listening to a thunderstorm that had been stalled to the north for the last five hours. We had just gone to

bed when the cell passed directly overhead. No counting seconds on this one; just FLASH-KABOOM!



The first coffee was sipped Sunday morning as the sun, a bright blazing ball, rose over the eastern shore. Breakfast time was set for 9:00 and everyone paddled out to enjoy one of the prettiest lakes in WCPP under ideal conditions. The water was smooth as a mirror and reflected like one too. The north end of the lake is full of high islands. There is probably more island area than water. This makes for fantastic paddling and looking for Caribou. Jim did get to see the rear end of a Caribou as it splashed out of the water and into the woods. A breakfast of blueberry pancakes and thick bacon really hit the spot. These boys really know how to travel in style. Ron and Jim headed out while I got caught up with my journal and did some packing. It is only three hours of leisure travel to our next camp on Royd Creek. We will not leave here until 3:00 so we can get the most out of Constellation Lake. Also the sun will make the trip more beautiful as it lights up the high shores of Royd Creek in its late afternoon glow.

The plan is on schedule and the loaded canoes head for the first portage a short distance from camp. The three portages to the next camp are unmaintained. The footing is treacherous as you walk the wet and rocky terrain around the shallow rapids. It is well worth the effort because of the special beauty of the passage. The afternoon sun did put

Royd Creek in its best light. The colors of the lichens and mosses were extra vivid. An Otter scolded as we entered the third and final portage of the day. Upon arrival at our large open rock campsite everyone went for a swim before setting up camp. The tents went up as Ron peeled potatoes. Now it gets even better, the potatoes are boiled in butter.

The potatoes are only a side dish in an awesome backcountry meal. Thick steaks are seared in a very hot frying pan and



then allowed to simmer to everyone's liking. This is a great campsite with a spectacular view of a bluff across the water. A few islands turn the whole view into a great 3D picture that everyone noticed. From this spot there are also unmaintained portages that will take you north to the Royd-Murdock chain of lakes. One 800 meter to Poodle Lake, take a close look at it shape, and a 400 to the park canoe route.

Monday morning we started the final leg to Joey Lake. After the next lake the creek narrowed and flowed through a bog for about a mile. A portage is required at one point in the bog to get around an area where the main channel is split into many small rivulets. In 300 meters we reenter the creek for the “Nile” section. Atop the next portage we stopped for lunch and enjoyed this photogenic section of the Nile.





Two short portages after the Nile section and we are paddling across picturesque Lightning Lake. After six hours of travel we have finished the last two short portages and arrived at our home for the next two nights. An easy pace had been maintained and energy levels are still high. Soon a quest for a Walleye supper is underway. The lake lived up to the billing I have been giving it. Later a large pan of Walleye fillets sizzle away. Thunderstorms were moving through the area but we went unscathed until after we went to bed. The Tundraline tent withstood a big wind blast and never leaked a drop of water.



Tuesday morning enough Walleye were caught from camp to provide a delicious side for our planned meal of pancakes. After a review it was decided to use up the bacon so we enjoyed Walleye, hash browns and bacon. The skies turned to mostly sunny with a welcome breeze. Jim went wandering, Ron fishing and I went to the north end of the lake to look for a better future portage route out of here on the Minjim route. It was an easy task and I was soon finished and back out on the lake. I went for a swim and fished for a few minutes and threw my Walleye into the creel at camp. A fat and sassy northern was released back into the lake. Many never read the rule book but should know that there is a slot for Northerns that must be released. An autopsy of the Walleyes stomachs revealed an abundance of minnows and insect stages about minnow size. In the evening everyone was out with their solo canoes in individual pursuits when converging storm cells forced a retreat to the rain tarp. A few hours later the rain had ceased and the skies cleared revealing extra bright stars on an inky background.

A breakfast of Joey Lake Walleye and pancakes started Wednesday on a good note. Everyone enjoyed another tour of Joey Lake before our scheduled 12:30 brat roast and 1:00 departure. Joey Lake is almost four miles long with its shores supporting Jack Pine trying to find enough nutrients in the meager soil to grow. It does not look like the typical Walleye Lake with healthy vegetation lining its shores. Ron, the only real fisherman in our trio, was baffled by it too. The spots he thought looked like good spots to catch a

Walleye would not produce and then another area could not be trolled through without a Walleye hitting the lure. He caught and released four more Walleye before heading back for the brat roast.

Camp was already packed so after dousing the fire we embarked on a leisure paced trip through three more portages to what I call High Camp Lake. Last year John located a nice spot high above the water to camp and hence the name. The third portage was the 800 meter trapper's trail that has one soft section as it crosses a creek. At the end of the portage I retrieved the pack I had hoisted when I came through a week ago. The High Camp was used and soon after the tarp went up a drizzle started and continued into the night. The Blackflies were pesky but the cool air that arrived with the drizzle drove them away from our camp. All of this did not put a stop to pizza night. Ron toasted the Pita Bread lightly in the Dutch oven and then put on the sauce and everyone's choice of ample toppings. A dash of water is poured into the hot pan and the lid secured. Two minutes later the water that went to steam has produced a delicious pizza. This was a trick learned from Cliff Jacobson.

Camp was packed up a little earlier Thursday morning because we will be traveling all day. We need to get to Indian House Lake so that on Friday we can travel on out to Lund Lake. A tiny portage and then a 300 meter walk through mossy woods and we are ready to paddle downstream to North Prairie Lake. Another group has come through here in May. With last summer's trip and their use the trail was easily found and followed without watching the track on the GPS map. We need to pull around one log with the present water levels. It is at least a meter lower than it was last summer when I last came through. A strong wind on the winding creek adds a lot to the energy needed to get the canoes around the sharp bends. At North Prairie we enter the realm of maintained portages for the rest of our trip. In recognition of our finishing the Minjim Route we pulled up on a big slab of rock that was out of the wind and had one last mug-up and some pudding. We briefly checked on a shortcut to Indian House using a creek but soon headed to the 950 meter maintained park portage. We had supper on the portage and then paddled north on Indian House with the sun getting lower in the sky as the miles and time ticked by. Any miles put in today would lessen the work tomorrow.

I should warn you that the 950 meter portage on the Indian House side is marked about 350 meters further north than it actually is. It has always been hard to locate and now I know why. There is a medium island and a small island in the area of the portage. If you proceed south to these two islands you will find that a line drawn through them points to the portage. Three trees are also blazed at the start but it does not look like a regular portage because of the sandy soils.

A flat rock 800 meters from the portage out of Indian House was used for our final camp together. Ron fixed a large container of buttered popcorn for our final evening together. Cool temperatures the next morning gifted us with an extra special sunrise. Heavy mists moved over the water with the sun piercing through. We easily put the next four portages behind us. I then selected a campspot and erected my tent while Ron and Jim prepare coffee and some pudding. I knew the portages and wanted to be as light as possible so a

daypack and a pack of empty containers and gear I was shedding were the only things not left near the tent.



When we got to the other end of the 950 meter portage a group heading to the Bloodvein River had just arrived. The leader seeing a problem developing said that they would stop for lunch while we finished using the sloppy portage. It was not near as bad as last year. The heavy rains at that time had the trail so flooded there was no way to see what you were stepping down on. A lot of times you were stepping into a bottomless hole. This year some of the riprap that had not rotted away could be used.

The next to last portage to small pond is great going until you hit the bog near the pond. Near the pond you are on floating bog. The ecological damage to the fragile bog is atrocious. Ever widening paths are being used to find something you will not fall through on the way to the pond. The scene reverses on the parking lot side of the pond. You hit the floating bog at full speed in hopes of sliding up far enough to step out of your canoe without swimming for shore. By 5:00 we had everything piled next to their vehicle in the Lund Lake parking lot. A final cup of coffee together and I bid my friends farewell and headed back to my campsite. On the way back I took time to study the lay of the land look at the topo information for the area. I have five more full days before my departure and I want to spend two of them searching for fixes to the nasty portages and also the infamous bog walk at the beginning of the 1500 meter to Knox Lake. These three portages are the present welcome that paddlers from all over the world get when they come to paddle the length of the famous Bloodvein, a National Heritage River. I hope to lessen their pain by finding a better way.



Part 4 Lund Lake Access to the Johnson Lake Access

Saturday morning arrives and I am anxious to get started on the search for that better way. I portaged over the 950 meter portage near camp with my canoe and daypack. My plan was to work on the Lund portage first but just one little peek at where the solid rock run led to should not take too long. I know myself well enough that my survival fanny pack and GPS were taken along for the quick glimpse. Not far up the rock run from the portage start the first rock cairn was spotted and then another. Along the line made by these two cairns I could see where the rock was devoid of lichen from foot traffic years ago. This trail disappeared into timber and I followed in the general direction. So much for one little peek, I could not stop now. My route took me in an arc that I knew was necessary to get around all the boggy areas along the present 950 portage. I could see that the terrain on a little wider arc would travel through easier terrain. A waypoint had been taken on the way across at the first wet area encountered. When I had gone far enough I simply headed to this spot. Starting back on the lake shore I used the first hill on the 950 portage and then recorded a track as I traveled back. Mental notes of other features were etched in my memory for eventual use. Not quite satisfied with my results another round trip was made and a path I was happy with recorded as a track on the GPS. The end result of a few hours romping in the woods, a 937 meter reroute of the swampy 950. All of the reroute is on solid ground with excellent footing. About half of the route is on barren rock. A few sections are too thick to carry a canoe through but I would be tempted to push my way through rather than plod all that bog with heavy loads.

A lunch stop on an island recharged my batteries for the more important search of a Lund reroute. The maps had been studied for months and I knew from passing through last summer that there was no fixing the pond problem on the Lund Portage. A completely new route was needed and the topo maps clearly showed there was not a lot to choose from. My study had showed me a possible route. Armed with the GPS I set out for Lund Lake. The route turned out to be very ugly. Dense trees growing up through blowdown piled waist high. Several small bogs and a larger one further east proved there was not good route near my chosen attempt. A start from further north on the return ran into the same big bog. I was working my way around it when I came upon a better option, a lot better option. I walked the shortest distance out to Lund and found fantastic terrain for a portage. A new track was recorded from there to my new option spot and straight to my canoe. A thick section was pushed through and then back up to what I love for a portage, large areas of open rock. As poor as my first attempt turned out to be I was amazed what great terrain lay just 400 meters further north. The portage as I walked it came out at 1170 meters with no bog.

My body was really dragging on the way to camp. A bucket of water sitting in the sun all day provided a warm shower. The sun had already disappeared over the high knob behind my camp and the warm water was a nice treat in the cool air. Laundry then soaked in the bucket as a hearty meal of Tuna Helper was cooked for an extra hearty supper. My camp sits in evening shade as the sun still illuminates the numerous islands dotting the lake. Another improvised recliner is well padded for my weary body on a picturesque evening. The loons are quiet and even the Gray Jays and Terns have ceased their calls. A pass on dessert was considered but the atmosphere on the water is just too perfect not to recline here and savor a pudding and sip hot tea.

A little sprinkle of rain started as I dressed Sunday morning. It passed before the coffee grounds had settled. With breakfast over and the coffee pot drained it was time to look at the 1500 meter portage to Knox Lake. I have never seen it but have read about it a number of times. All agree it is in need of a reroute. The daypack was outfitted with everything to fix lunch. Storms are forecast so the rain gear was shoved in too. A short time later I was paddling away from the 325 meter portage on the way to the 1500. High barren cliffs adorned the other side of the lake. A twenty minute paddle into the wind put me at the turn to the creek the portage starts from. Before I got to the creek a waypoint was recorded at what looked like the best start of a reroute for the portage start. It had solid rock to stand on and some large boulders that would make a nice airy spot to rest while doing the portage. The goal will be to travel up the portage until it hits solid ground. From there a route will be plotted to get to the airy rocks I have chosen. The soupy trail lived up to all that I had read about it. When I reached solid ground I found that some work had already started on the cutting of a reroute. The short cleared section and the flagging was heading for the exact spot I had picked out. Finding out that the fix was already underway I headed back out to open water to fix lunch. Out of curiosity I landed at my chosen boulders and walked into the trees expecting to see flagging for the new reroute. When I saw none I used the GPS to head right to where the park had started the reroute. Halfway through the 600 meters I encountered a wet band of Alder. I kept

going and finally ran into the orange flagging. Following the flagging showed that the flagger had also run into the wet band and tried getting around it to the west and then must have given up. The early after noon was spent walking the whole area to get a grasp on what the options were for the rest of the reroute. What I surmised was that the flagger was right on track but 55 meters of wet ground has to be crossed and then it is flat dry ground all the way to my chosen boulders. On each side of the 55 meter crossing the wet area just gets wider. The reroute will add about 200 meters to the portage but will take away the real sting of the soupy 400 meters.

Thunderstorms had been dumping rain on me for a few hours and thoughts on the way back to camp were of pulling on a set of extra heavy poly and sipping hot tea under the protection of the rain tarp. The sun returned to camp just after I did so the poly remained in its sealed plastic bag. The tea and sunshine warmed me nicely. Sunday closed with another magic evening atmosphere but I was too tired to stay up and enjoy it.



At 6:30 Monday morning I awoke and looked out on a totally different scene. Thick fog shrunk my world to the two closest islands and a little shoreline. As I sit sipping coffee in the diffused world around me I remember awakening before dawn. The most beautiful call of a distant loon came across the water. It held one high note for the longest time. My words cannot begin to describe it. I wondered if loons too have some especially gifted voices in their choir. For two hours I recline on my pads and watch the changing visual

effects as the sun and the fog have a tug of war. A thousand images, each one suitable for framing, pass in front of me. There is plenty of time to get to Johnson Lake by Thursday morning so I practice what I preach. When you find yourself in Paradise stop and revel in it. The latest scenes in this morning's movie included two loons slowly crossing the water, their heads constantly peeking below the surface in a hunt for breakfast. The epic movie stretches to three hours and ends in the usual way. The sun wins and a breeze blows away the last of the mist.

The goal for the day is to end up on the south side of Indian House Lake. That will enable an early morning paddle through the wide lazy stream south east of the lake. For the first time in 27 days the portages only require two carries. My friends took out one of my packs containing empty containers, fishing gear and trash. That left me with two 60 lb. loads to portage. How sweet that is! The first three portages to Indian House Lake are soon behind me. On the lake north of Indian House I make a search for campsites for future reference. Nothing obvious stands out but in the search I paddle east through a wide opening into another section of the lake. I notice on the map there are three more small lakes closely connected to this one. An inspection of the short stream flowing from the first one shows it requires a portage. On a streamside walk through spacious forest a meter long blaze is spotted on a huge old dead tree. This only increases my interest in what lay ahead. It is only a short way to the next lake and I stop there. This would be an excellent route of lost portages for someone to hone their skills on. Rather than camp on Indian House with its crossroad of canoe trails why not venture in here and be assured of solitude.



Returning to my canoe I look around for a rest spot. An open point protruding into the lake looks like a potentially good spot. I land and look around the area and find an old moss filled firer and a small stack of rotting firewood cut years ago. Other finds are the jaw bone of a massive Northern Pike and several tent pads now grown thick with lichen. A fantastic campsite only 300 meters east of the route to Indian House. As I head to the narrows leading to the portage there is another campsite on the east side.

The paddle across Indian House on a warm and hazy afternoon is surreal. An orange peel surface and no discernable breeze give the whole landscape a tropical look. Islands approach on the doldrums sea and then slip past to prove I am really moving.

There is a shortcut to North Prairie from Indian House that I was told about. We made a quick attempt to find it last week and turned back and used the 950 meter portage. I stop for a late lunch and a cup of coffee to snap me back to reality after the unworldly Indian House crossing. Fully awake, I head downstream toward North Prairie and quickly pull over and use a grown over portage on river left to get around 70 meters of rapids. The rapids end as the stream enters a small lake. The stream exits the lake close by and a shallow rapids is paddled through. Soon another rapid blocks the way and I walk in on river left and find an open portage path. I follow it 300 meters and get below the rapids. It is the rapids where we turned around on our attempt last week. I know now that if you keep on river left it is open to North Prairie. Other channels are blocked by logs and cattails. The route is not maintained by the park but is being used by some as a shortcut avoiding the 950 meter portage. At one time the portage trail seems to have gone all the way to avoid the rapids I paddled through so use caution if traveling from North Prairie to Indian House. It is only half the portage distance as the maintained route so could save a little time for the adventurous. What I found most interesting is that it is only 440 meters from the bottom of the long rapids overland to Indian House. Why didn't the portage go that way?

Only a light wind was blowing across Indian House so I paddled across the open water to look for a campsite on one of the many islands on the east side of the lake. A sunny shoreline in the distance looked interesting but when I rounded the tip of one of the islands a nice site with evening shade was too good to pass up. Even if the wind came up during the night I could escape using the cover of the other islands. It was hot in the tent and I could not get to sleep. The mystery of a portage trail not coming directly out to Indian House from the rapids occupied my mind so the flashlight and GPS were turned on to check the measurements again. The GPS topo map showed promising terrain in the area. In the morning a return to the area would be on top of the days agenda.

First light arrived and with it the howling of some wolves. A little more sleep and I got up for the moving day routine. With a months practice it went pretty fast and I was on my way to check out the portage mystery. Picking a spot that provided the shortest route to the base of the rapids was another surprise. There were no blazes on any of the numerous mature trees. One old rusted condensed milk can was the only sign left of any use. I made a bee line for the base of the rapids but when that entered lower terrain I edged north to stay on some hogs-backs that led in almost the right direction. Soon I ran into the portage

trail around the rapids and went down it about 70 meters to the base of the rapids. There were blazes in the area but all seemed to be marking the portage along the rapids. Now that I had checked it out I still did not have the answers I was after. This was the quickest way that I can see to travel from Indian House to North Prairie yet no blazes were found on the large trees. There is something that I am not seeing about this situation. Before I come this way again I will spend some time staring at the topo maps.

As I paddled down the channel southeast of Indian House a raven flew from the edge of the stunted Spruce trees lining the water. That is a clue in the north woods and I kept looking ashore as I passed. Nothing was spotted but my nose told me to back up and check it out. One step up onto the boggy shore and I was looking down on what the wolves had been howling about. Moose hide, bones and stomach contents were strewn over the ground. By what I could find of the moose I figured it was a yearling cow moose. I do not know if calves would be that big in August, maybe they are. The only meat left was between the ribs. Everything else was gnawed to the bone. I was pretty certain the moose had only been killed hours before. The flies had just arrived, there were no bird droppings and everything seemed very fresh. One surprising thing was a section of lung that had not been eaten. Near my cabin one year I jumped a deer ahead of me and did not know it. A wolf saw it and caught it and killed it. I came upon it a few minutes later and found that the wolf's first choice of food was to tear through the diaphragm and eat the lungs. Also surprising were the presences of a Chickadee, Gray Jay and Magpie at the kill within seconds of it being killed. They must follow the wolves and root them on.

When I entered the next body of water a family of otters were bobbing like corks and snorting their displeasure at me. The 550 meter portage went fine but 50 meters down the 450 meter portage I was able to put the canoe back in the flood waters and paddle half the portage. The paddling part was great but the transition back to solid trail was really nasty. It has always been a poor portage and now had gotten even worse. After pulling my canoe through the stinking muck and getting on better ground an even more powerful essence filled the air. The portage trail was scratched up in many places by animal claws. A pile of bear droppings was easy to tell but some other midsize droppings were unfamiliar. I have smelled a lot of musk in my day from different animals but the sweet but awful smell on this portage had me wondering what a wolverine left as his calling card. All of the droppings on the trail were full of moose hair so I assumed one lay dead not too far away. It was a little eerie walking the narrow trail hemmed in close with vegetation.

This portage had always been bad and it was my trip agenda to have a look around as I passed through. I was dumbfounded when I checked out some higher ground starting at the end of the portage. I stayed on the high ground all the way back to the other end of the portage and it was 60 meters shorter than the boot sucking portage. The next portage to Crystal is another messy one. Before the trip I had noted a possible solution further down the lake. At that spot I walked up and over to the next lake on solid rock and it was only 95 meters instead of 225 meters of streambed and muck. I think some of these portages are winter trails the trappers had opened for their snowmobiles a number of decades ago.

Paddling the 450 meter portage

Crystal Lake had been my destination point all day. When I got there I decided to travel on through a few more portages. The wind was blowing pretty good into my face on Page Lake. I wanted to camp here to avoid any boaters on Peterson Lake. Last year I could hear a generator there and I am not ready for that. Page is pretty densely lined with trees but I



spotted some open rock on the south end and paddled towards it. The first impression from the water was not too impressive but there was nothing else evident. A second look and I waypointed it as a good campsite. It had a great view, plenty of protection and room for two tents and a tarp. A quick dip in Page Lake redefined the word quick, the water was cold. It was too cold for me even on a warm and muggy evening. Near bedtime a wind change brought a refreshing north wind through the tent screen. Hours later a delayed response to the colliding fronts arrived in the form of a thunderstorm directly overhead. A bed of soft moss and the cool air allowed me to sleep soundly excepting one very close lightning strike.

My new Tundraline tent from Eureka maintained its clean record during last night's storm. It has never allowed any rain to enter. The third time I put it up it took 12 minutes and that has gotten faster with familiarity. It is not a free standing tent but with plenty of trees and rocks around I have found this to be an asset. I always tied my Timberlite Three for added stability anyway. I can find no fault with the design and manufacture of the Tundraline. It does tend to entrap Blackflies between the sewn in inner mesh and rain fly and they make some noise as they bounce off the fabric. For my use on a solo trip it is just too large and heavy. A good compression sack shrinks the size but cannot diminish the 14 lbs it weighs. Last week Ron and I shared it and found it to truly be a three man tent. I am 6' 2" and had plenty of room to sleep sideways in the tent. Four men could sleep in this tent with all their gear stowed in the large vestibules on each end. During a night on Joey a storm cell passed over with violent winds. The tent did some shaking but easily withstood the blast and never let in a drop of water. I just need a smaller version. (After the trip I checked on that and found that Exped may have what I need. Their Exped Aries Mesh seems to have the same basic design in a much smaller tent.)

The extra portages yesterday allow me to have another lazy morning around camp. Folgers coffee bags had been used for my morning brew until Ron showed up with the real stuff. He muttered something when he saw the coffee bags, something about being illegal in three states. When they left he gave me enough of the good stuff to finish the

trip. The bag was shaken into the pot this morning to use the last granule. Supplies are nearly gone and that is the way it was planned and packed. Every meal is calculated ahead of time. The measurement scale on the lexon bottles comes in very handy for staying on track. For example, three quart and one pint bottle of gorp needed to last until the end. That may sound like a lot of gorp but figures out to only four meager ounces each day. You may have noted that is only 28 days worth. I told you it is calculated and I mean it. The jars were filled to the brim to take care of the extra days and even leave a few kernels for over indulgence. The lexon bottles mean packing out empty containers but also guarantee my gorp and other things will stay dry and secure. I do have trouble with oil seeping out of them if they are not kept upright.

The landscape has changed since leaving Bell Lake. After doing two portages I have stopped at a campsite used on a 2001 trip. The campsite was probably on old cabin site. The floor timbers covered the best tent pad then but have since rotted away to provide a soft bed. Others have visited the point with its three terraces since I made note of it in a journal. It is a half-day or less from the Johnson Lake access. There is a private cabin 2 miles east near the portage to Douglas but I have never seen anyone there. A cabin on Peterson Lake to the northwest makes this a nice middle ground to spend your first or last night on. Tomorrow I want to get an extra early start of my drive back to Illinois so my plan is to camp near the stream on the southeast tip of Douglas. It has been a great trip. The weather has been perfect. Low or nonexistent winds and most of the rain came at night. Bugs were never bad and have lessened each day. Yesterday I found myself pursuing a lone mosquito buzzing nearby. Realizing what I was doing the lone insect received a pardon. Now it is time to quit stalling and bring this journey to a close.

If you have any questions about the areas covered or would like to travel it yourself be sure and contact me.